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INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 002334

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A, S/CRS, SA/PB, S/CT,
EUR/RPM AND NEA
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN
OSD FOR SHIVERS
CENTCOM FOR CG CSTC-A. CG CJTF-82 POLAD, JICCEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/11/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER ASEC MARR IR AF

SUBJECT: PRT HERAT: IRAN AS A MULTI-FACETED ACTOR IN HERAT
PROVINCE

REF: KABUL 2324

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Carol Rodley for reasons
1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: Iran's strategic and economic
interests in western Afghanistan, and particularly in
Herat, are expressed in a mix of traditional (mostly
soft) and non-traditional (harder-edged) engagements.
While Iran's sponsorship of official and unofficial
crossborder delegations and aid/development projects
is welcome by Afghanistan, evidence of Iranian-
manufactured weapons in Herat (recently witnessed by
PRTOff) is of growing concern to Afghan officials who
voice concern over Iran's potentially destabilizing
influence in the province. END SUMMARY

SOFT POWER

¶2. (C) Iran maintains a strong and obvious presence in
Herat. The robustly-staffed Iranian Consulate-General
in Herat (33 officially accredited diplomats)
facilitates ministerial delegations and a effective
and wide-ranging program of lower level exchanges.
These include student-faculty exchanges with the
university and inviting Herat Provincial Council
members to meet their counterparts in Mashad, Iran.
A large Iranian trade delegation recently visited the
province. It included investors representing the
dairy industry, medical procurement services, flour
and pasta factory owners, electrical appliances,
machinery and tools, engineering services and
commercial insurance. Afghan industries in these same
sectors are concerned that the local businesses will
not be able to withstand a concerted and significant
Iranian challenge.

¶3. (C) Iran's traditional cultural influence in
western Afghanistan is being reinforced by GOI
cultural projects. It recently dedicated three
library facilities at the university in Herat - the
Pilgrimage library, the new Herat

University library, and the library of the Women's Affairs Department.

HARD WEAPONS

¶4. (S) Iran is also providing weapons to Afghans. In April, the Herat PTS Director showed PRToff weapons that were turned in by Taliban reconcilees. These weapons included light weapons and grenade launchers and bore the stamps of the Iranian factories where they were manufactured, primarily in 2006 and 2007. According to the PTS Director, the reconcilees had claimed they received training in the Birjand, Zabul, Chaloos, and Karaj provinces of Iran and said that Iranian officials promised them access to anti-aircraft rockets. The Afghan Ministry of Interior (MOI) reported that the Herat Regional Police Command located SA-7 missiles supplied by Iran and that a number of local residents are reputedly on the receiving end of the Iranian weapons supply line, including Mullah Abdul Hamid Eshaqzi and Nassrullah Khan (the titular successor and son of former assassinated Warlord Amunallah Khan). According to MOI, Shindand district, located in the southern part of Herat province, is a major conduit of illegal arms, supplies and narcotics to and from Iran. This contributes to Shindand volatility.

¶5. (S) Ghoryan's District Governor stated that Iranian elements have instigated Ghoryan residents to demonstrate against the upgrade of the Shindand

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Airbase. He claimed that many senior officials of his district and others are direct, paid agents of the Iranian regime. These Afghan officials allegedly meet with Iranian intelligence officials (the Iranian Intelligence Service 113) multiple times every month in Iran and are issued multiple-entry visas for easy access. The District Governor added his view that major Jamiat and former Jihadist figures maintain close links with Iran. He said they consider their western neighbor an "elder brother." The District Governor says that relatives of senior local NDS operatives enjoy these multiple-entry visas to Iran. He mentioned the elder brother of the local district prosecutor in Ghoryan district as being among these agents.

MUSCLE FLEXING AND RECRUITING

¶6. (S) PRToff's principal interlocutors from NDS and other GOA agencies assert that Iran could have substantial destabilizing influence if it chose. There was concern expressed in March, when Iran undertook major maneuver operations in Tayebaad and Torbate Jam without any warning to GOA authorities. Local GOA authorities saw these maneuvers as aggressive and resented the Iranian muscle-flexing. The maneuvers coincided with the detention of five Iranian diplomats in Iraq.

¶7. (S) The ANP Police Chief showed PRToff a recent police report in Farsi, detailing the debriefing of an Afghan male, recruited by the IGRC to a training camp in Birjand, Iran. He was told to return to Afghanistan and recruit others. The IGRC reportedly recruits Afghan youth with the promise of large bonuses for service in Iraq against Coalition forces. This particular Afghan recruit had been issued an Iranian identification document and given 2.5 million Tomans, which were deposited into an Iranian bank

account. The recruit reported that units of seventy men each were trained in Birjand to serve with the Mahdi Army in the Basra region of Iraq. This recruit claimed he fled to Turkey, then back to Iran, and eventually returned to his home in Afghanistan.

DEPORTEES AND MEDIA MANIPULATION

¶8. (C) Approximately 140,000 Afghans have been deported by Iran since April 21 (ref). Others left voluntarily before Iranian authorities evicted them. The flow continues through the border crossing point at Islam Qala. The rough treatment dealt to some of the deportees in Iran has been featured in television and audio broadcasts. There have been claims of several deaths and numerous instances of physical mistreatment by Iranian authorities. The Iranian Consul-General in Herat responded to the reports with a letter to the station protesting the coverage of the deportee issue. This letter, in turn, provoked anger from provincial leaders who complained that the station was being manipulated by Iran. Herat TV showed viewers the letter written by the Iranian CG. Text follows:

¶9. (U) Text of Letter: From the Consulate-General of Islamic Republic of Iran in Herat:

In the name of God, the Most Merciful and Compassionate

Dear Mr. Hassamudin SHAMS
Director, Herat National TV and Radio

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Greetings,

Taking into consideration that Herat TV has published interviews contrary to reality and truth regarding physically abusing and beating up illegal Afghan refugees recently repatriated to Afghanistan, and other slander and lies against the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is now expected that in the future you will respect the principles of a free media by not publishing or airing fake news that is designed to adversely affect the fraternal, friendly and historical relations of our two countries. We ask Herat TV to take action upon receipt of this letter, in order to further enlighten the Afghan public, based on your current Afghan media climate and rules pertaining to free speech.

Najafi MANESH
Consul-General

PLAYING WITH THE TIGER

¶10. (C) Edgy about the harder elements of Iranian influence, Afghan officials are calibrating their reaction. In June, Herat Governor Anwari accepted yet another donation from the Iranian Consul-General - five new Samand vehicles produced under license in Iran from BMW to be used for "protocol purposes," including presumably the weekly delegation of official Iranians. Iranian Consul-General has promised the Governor renewed attention on development efforts, and has stated that a team of development experts will travel to Herat from Iran in the near future.
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